Django's Chromatic Flourishes

BY CHARLES H. CHAPMAN

RECENTLY I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to travel to France to experience and participate in the 20th annual Django Reinhardt Festival. This three-day event is held in his home town—the village of Samois sur Seine, on the tiny island of Ile du Berceau. Here I listened to many of the finest Gypsy jazz players pay tribute to Django and was fortunate enough to pick up a few tips, including the following techniques that will add a Gypsy flair to your solos.

Open-strings and chromatic slides. One of Django's trademarks was a fast run containing chromatic notes and open strings. He would often conclude such runs by using a rapid, one-finger slide to ascend on one string to a new position. The trick is to avoid using any pressure from your thumb. In fact, the experts don't even touch the back of the neck as they ascend.

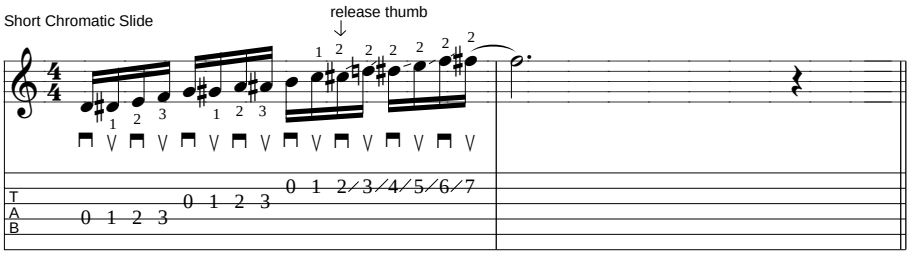
Ex. 1 illustrates the move. In beats three and four, keep your 2nd finger on the second string, and simply slide up the neck from *C♯* to *F♯*, picking a note on each fret as you pass it. (Depending on the musical context, you can continue higher.) Use alternate picking as shown.

Ex. 2 hints at Django's longer runs. Again, keep your fretting-hand thumb off the back of the neck, maintain a gentle, yet firm pressure with your 2nd finger, and use strict alternate picking.

Diminished arpeggios. Ascending with diminished triplet arpeggios is another great Gypsy-jazz move (**Ex. 3**). Pay attention to the fingering and picking. This lick works over a *Gdim7*, but if you develop the ability to "spit it out" smoothly and quickly, you can use it in other ways. For example, in a *G* blues, you can play the phrase heading from *G7* into *C7* or *C9* (the IV7), or returning to *G7* from *C7* or *C9*. Experiment with other keys and string sets.

Incorporate these techniques in your playing, and heads will turn the next time you perform.

Ex. 1



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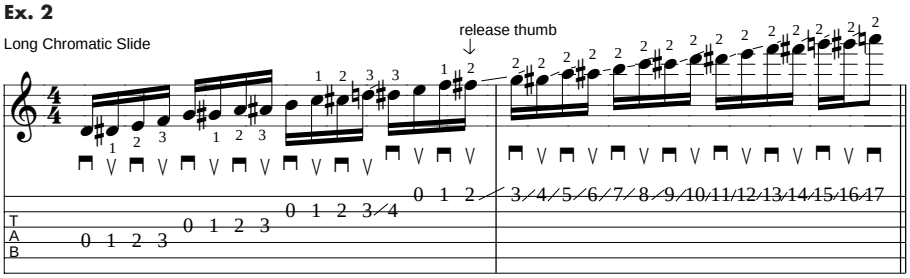

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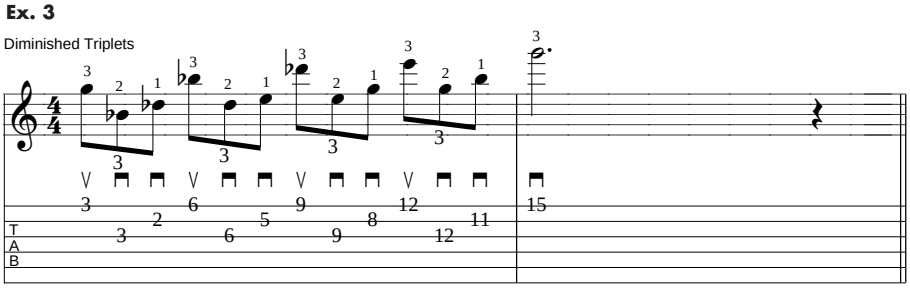
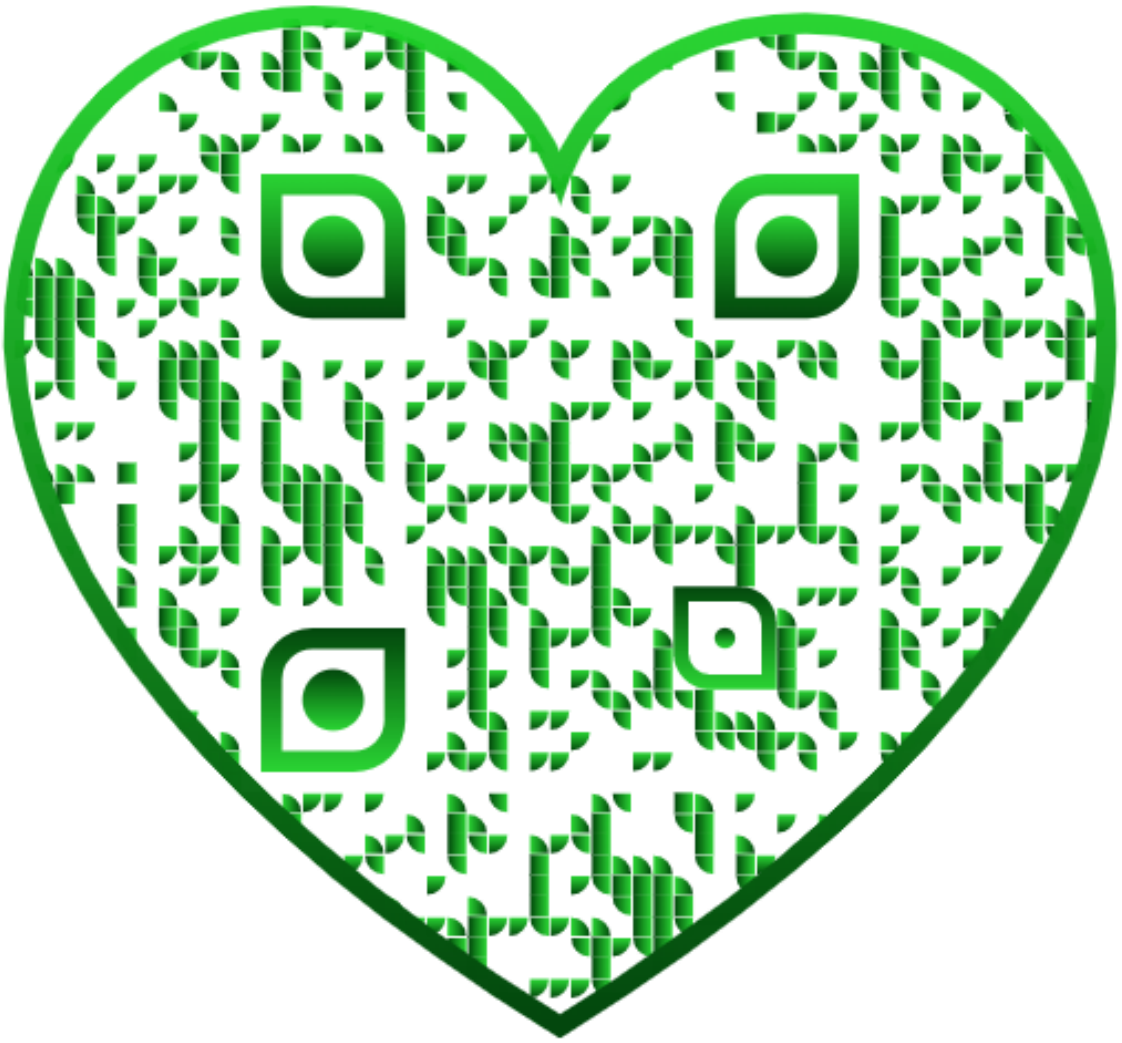


Charles H. Chapman is a Professor at Berklee College of Music. Look for his new Mel Bay books—*The Drop 2 Concept for Guitar* and *Bass Line Basics*—as well as a CD of nine George Van Eps chord solos arranged for 6-string guitar (also from Mel Bay).

audio version available!
www.truefire.com

"I still prefer physically dragging the sound out of the guitar."—Adrian Belew, June '82 *GP*



BOOK BROWSING

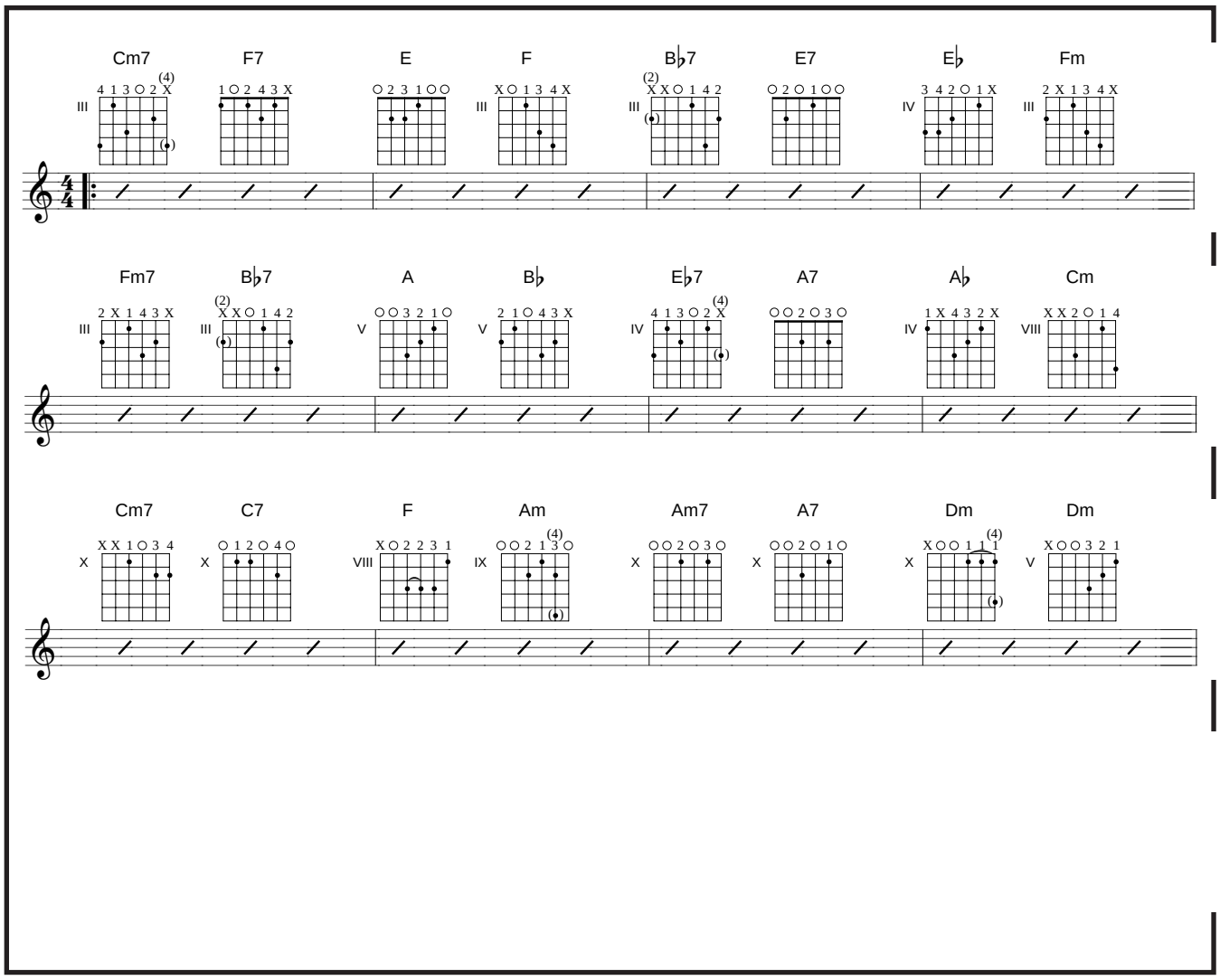
OPEN CHORD ADVANTAGE

MOST GUITAR BOOKS FOCUS ON exploring popular styles, developing technique, or mastering music theory, but John Bunge's *Open Chord Advantage* [$14.95 from Creative Concepts] is refreshingly different. This book explores open-string voicings in every conceivable position, key, and flavor. We're not talking garden-variety *G*, *C*, or *Em*: Bunge fills 62 pages with 29 exercises covering a passel of major, minor, dominant 7th, minor 7th, major 7th, major 6th, minor/major 7th, and minor 6th shapes, as well as various suspended, extended, and altered fingerings— all in standard tuning.

Using concise and friendly prose, Bunge explains the theory behind his chords and provides useful application and practice tips. It's a very musical journey through some intense fingerings and sounds. You're sure to find grips you've never played before—what a treat!

Excerpted from a chapter on chromatic chord progressions, the following example offers a feel for Bunge's material. This 16-bar journey illustrates how to integrate open-string voicings with more common jazz voicings and barre chords. Bunge writes, "You can start using these open-string chords right away. If you try them in some music you know, you'll find the sounds will open up new dimensions—especially in songs that have become boring or routine. Even better, try writing some music using these chords."

For more information on the author or other titles from Creative Concepts, visit www.creativeconcepts.com.



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Liquid Clusters

BY ANDRÉ BUSH

HERE'S A COOL WAY TO INCREASE THE number of chord voicings you have at your fingertips, build fretboard confidence, and improve fretting-hand dexterity. As you explore this concept, you'll discover a whole new way to look at chordal playing—one that blurs the distinction between comping and soloing.

Modal voicings. The game is simple:

• Select three strings. These can be adjacent or non-adjacent.

• Choose a major scale.

• On each of the selected strings, locate and finger a note from your chosen major scale. This becomes your starting voicing. To allow for maximum fretboard prowling, fret this first voicing in the lowest possible position.

• Harmonically ascend through the major scale by playing three-note clusters composed of scale tones. Stay within the scale, and don't skip any notes.

• When you reach the upper limits of your fretboard, reverse direction and descend to your starting point.

Ex. 1 illustrates the process. In this instance, we've selected the top three strings and the *C* major scale. Notice how each string contains a sequence of notes from within *C* major: *B*, *C*, *D*, *E*, and *F* on the third string; *C*, *D*, *E*, *F*, and *G* on the second string; and *A*, *B*, *C*, *D*, and *E* on the first string. When you play each three-note cluster harmonically, you get a series of modal voicings that you can use either in conjunction with standard chord structures or as substitutes for them.

Ex. 2 shows what happens when you mix adjacent and non-adjacent strings. We're still in *C* major, but this time, we're playing on the fifth, second, and first strings. The bottom intervals—either major or minor tenths—yield an open sound often used by classical guitarists.

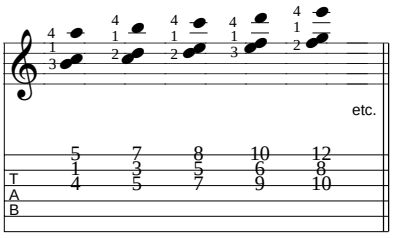
Chords into lines. You can transform these modal voicings into lines, as in **Ex. 3**. In this IIm7-V7-Imaj7 cadence, bar 1's arpeggios come directly from the voicings we played in Ex. 1. Their inherent interval jumps create intriguing melodic contours.

When you've got the hang of moving three voices up and down the neck within a given major scale, try four strings. Also, be sure to experiment with other scale types—such as melodic minor, harmonic minor, and diminished.

This technique of moving linearly through a scale will help you break free from the constraints of standard chord voicings and position playing—what the late, great Howard Roberts called "frozen blocks of sound."

San Francisco-based André Bush melds jazz, R&B, and blues on his latest disc *Invisible City*. The album features jazz heavyweights Steve Smith on drums and David Liebman on soprano saxophone. For more info, visit www.andrebush.com, or e-mail Bush at andrebush@aol.com.

Ex. 1



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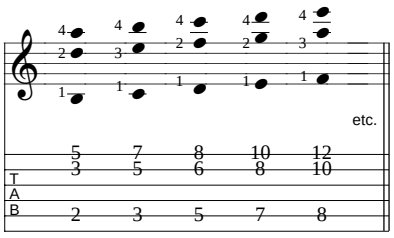

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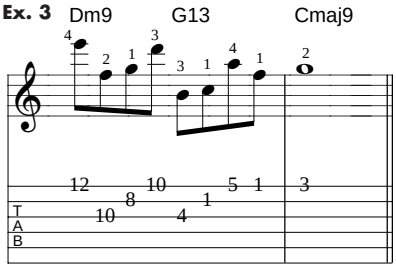


Tips Jar

If you just play a scale for two octaves, you're doing it by rote. You don't really learn anything because you're not exercising your mind—which you must do if you want to improvise. Play the scale using interval skips." —JOE PASS, APR. '76 *GP*

BUSH PHOTO: STEVE JENNING

Irving Ashby on Accompanying Oscar Peterson

JAZZ GUITARIST IRVING ASHBY had the tricky job of accompanying piano virtuoso Oscar Peterson. "I used to comp brass section-type licks," Ashby told *GP*. "You couldn't give Oscar the Freddie Green treatment, because those 'chomps' would get in his way. You had to fill the gaps with call-and-response things.

"The musical demands Oscar made were *horrendous*. If something I voiced clashed with something he played, Oscar was too much of a gentleman to remark about it, but I'd know it, and was expected never to do it again. I later learned that Herb Ellis [who followed Ashby and Barney Kessel in Peterson's band] used to become nauseated at the thought of going back onstage to face that 'monster' on piano.

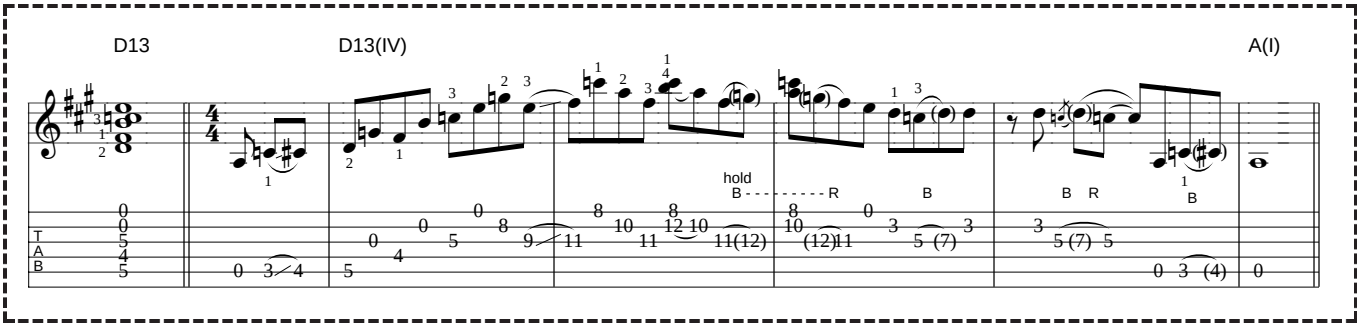
"Oscar would stop by my hotel room, give me a tape of tunes for that night, and say, 'Have fun, man.' I'd spend all day with that tape and my guitar. Right there on the tape, he'd say, 'Okay, hold it. Now in this passage that's coming up, I want you to play in unison with me, but an octave lower.' Man, the things on those tapes were *skull-busters*. I couldn't complain, though, because Oscar thought enough of me to make special tapes."

Irving Ashby backing another famous boss—Nat King Cole—whom he joined in 1946.

Lick of the Month

THE JANGLY 13

THIS MONTH'S LICK COMES courtesy of Ira Gitlin, who hails from Takoma Park, Maryland. "The *D13* voicing that precedes the lick is my favorite bluesy IV7 in the key of *A*. With its open strings and poignant minor second, this extended chord sounds more jangly than jazzy. The lick spins this *D13* voicing into a four-bar phrase. The open first, second, and third strings provide the 9, 13, and 11, respectively, and those harmonies are cloned as we move up the neck. Pluck the strings with a pick-and-fingers attack, let everything ring, and hold those bends! Happy twanging."



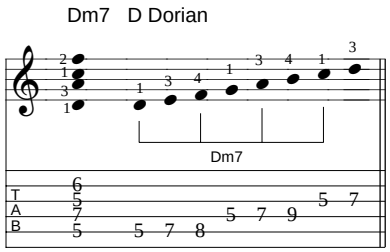
Send us your candidate for Lick of the Month (preferably notated *and* on cassette), along with a brief explanation of why it's cool and how to play it. If we select your offering, you'll get a funky custom T-shirt that's available *only* to Lick of the Month club members. Mail your entry to Lick of the Month, *Guitar Player*, 411 Borel Ave. #100, San Mateo, CA 94402. Include your name, address, and phone number. Materials won't be returned, and please don't call the office to check the status of your submission. You'll get your shirt if your lick is chosen.

"You've got to get it mentally, and you've got to get it mechanically."—Otis Rush, Oct. '87 *GP*

Dancing with Dorian

BY ANDY ELLIS

Ex. 1



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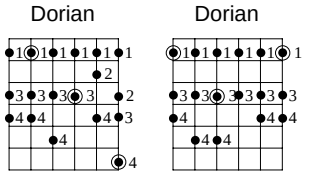
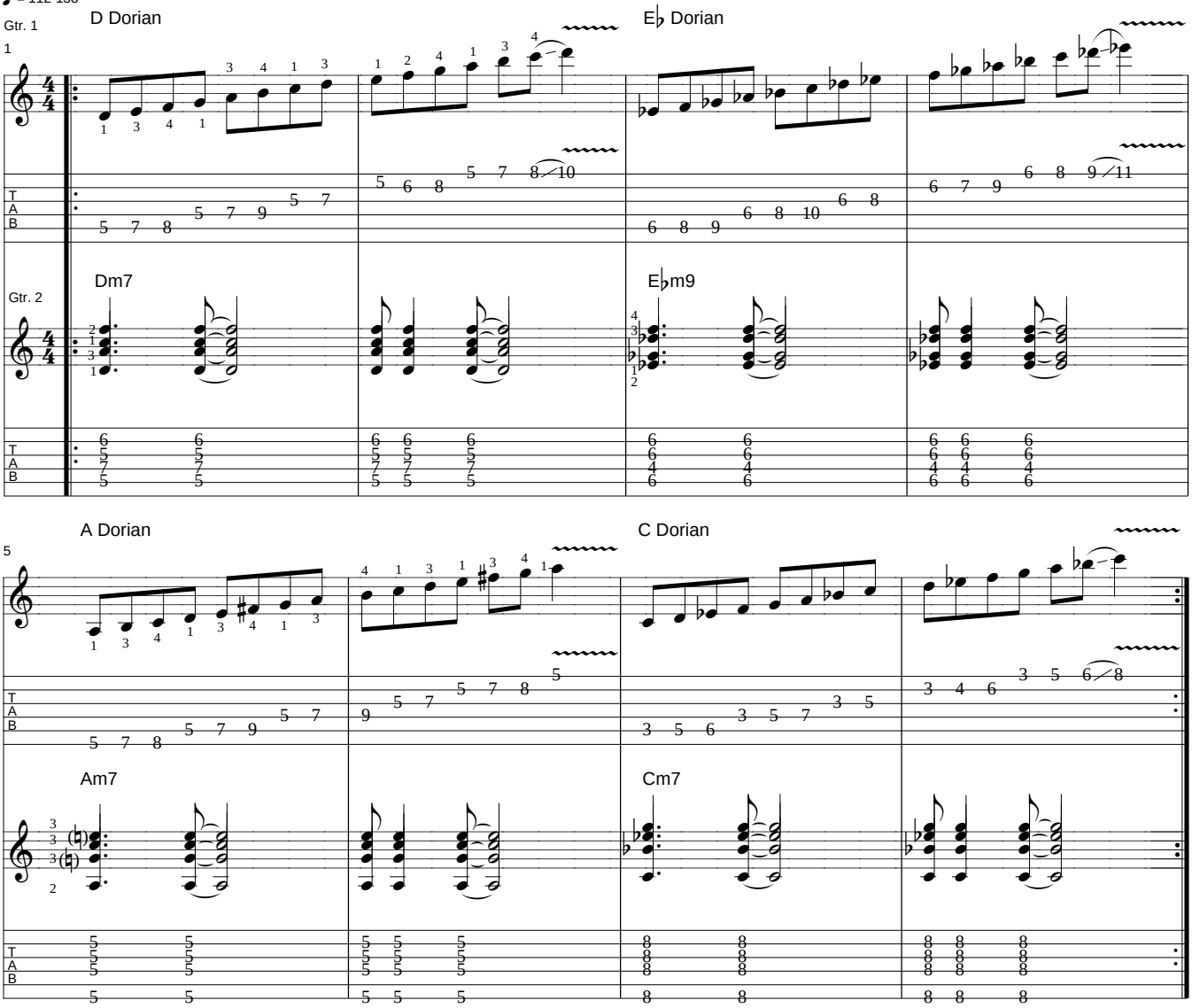


IF YOU MADE IT THROUGH LAST month's "Modes in a Nutshell"—an overview of how modes are constructed and how they relate to major scales—you're ready to start making some modal noise.

Fits like a glove. Ever noticed how some progressions stay within a single tonal center, while others switch tonalities every few measures? For instance, take a blues in *G*. Though savvy players customize their lines for each chord, you can get away with playing a *G* blues scale over *G7*, *C7*, and *D7*—the I7, IV7, and V7. In

Ex. 3



"Those mistakes, that experimentation—that's how you arrive at things."—David Lindley, April '82 *GP*

this scenario, one scale fits many chords.

But suppose a progression's chords skip around, say, in minor thirds. In this case, one scale isn't adequate—you have to shift tonalities to keep up with the harmony. One way to deal with shifting tonal centers is to treat each chord as an isolated entity. Instead of "one scale fits many chords," the strategy becomes "each chord gets its own scale." Modes are ideally suited for such situations because each one (Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Mixolydian, Lydian, Aeolian, and Locrian) fits a particular chord type like a glove. In time, you'll learn to associate each mode with a corresponding chord flavor and vice versa.

To explore this concept, let's focus on the Dorian mode, which works beautifully over minor 7th chords and their relations. Look at **Ex. 1**: *Dm7* consists of *D*, *F*, *A*, and *C* (1, ♭3, 5, ♭7). As you can see, *D* Dorian contains these chord tones, separated by neighbor tones a whole-step or half-step away. Another way to look at this: A *Dm7* arpeggio dwells inside *D* Dorian. (This works for any minor 7th arpeggio and any Dorian mode, provided both share the same root.)

Ascend and descend through the two Dorian fingerings in **Ex. 2**. The roots are circled, so you can play these forms at any fret. For example, play the first pattern at the fifth position to get *D* Dorian, then strum *Dm7* to create a harmonic context. Back and forth—chord and mode.

As you're picking *D* Dorian, listen for the chord tones (*D*, *F*, *A*, *C*), and then identify them on the fretboard. Chord tones are consonant—they blend into the harmony—and non-chord tones stand out against the harmony. When improvising melodically, balance the restlessness of non-chord tones (tension) with the stability of chord tones (release). An intriguing line needs both elements.

Now play the second Dorian pattern, this time at the tenth fret. Again, alternate between *Dm7* and *D* Dorian, identifying the chord tones and non-chord tones.

There are dozens of Dorian patterns on the fretboard, yet you can accomplish a lot with just these two fingerings. It's always better to *command* two patterns than have a vague idea of many forms.

Maiden voyage. Ready to make some modal music? **Ex. 3** shows a repeating eight-bar progression with shifting tonal centers. Notice that all four chords are minors, so you can hit each one with a Dorian mode that starts on the same root: *D* Dorian for *Dm7*, *E*♭ Dorian for *E*♭*m9*, *A* Dorian for *Am7*, and *C* Dorian for *Cm7*.

Record several cycles of this progression (Gtr. 2). Start your modal maiden voyage by playing Gtr. 1 as written. This yields a two-bar, two-octave ascending modal pattern that corresponds to each chord. Go nice and slowly.

Let the fun begin. Simply ascending through a mode is not improvising—we still have work to do. The next step is to craft melodic lines from the raw material shown in Gtr. 1. Some tips:

• Be selective: Over a given chord, play only a handful of notes. Let your ear guide your fingers, not the other way around.

• Vary your rhythms by alternately sustaining certain notes and quickly playing others.

• Vary the pitches while repeating the same rhythmic pattern. This is especially effective when you switch from one mode to another.

• Include interval jumps.

• Skip strings.

• Carefully insert quick, chromatic passing tones. These will fall outside the Dorian tonality, yet, as long as you don't sustain them, their momentary dissonance will provide tangy, ear-grabbing colors. Chromatic passing tones generate momentum, and pull the listener into your scale-tone or chord-tone resolutions.

• Occasionally try sliding into a scale tone from a half-step below.

Final observations. Though we've only scratched Dorian's surface, mastering Ex. 3 will give you a sense of what this mode is all about. Next time out, we'll encounter the Mixolydian mode. In the meantime, see if you can drop into Dorian the next time you jam over an extended minor chord.

All of us—no matter how long we've played or how skilled we are—have gaps in our knowledge. Back Track is an ongoing Sessions series designed to fill these holes and inspire musical breakthroughs. Got a topic you'd like to see us address? Send your question to Back Track, c/o *Guitar Player*, 411 Borel Ave. #100, San Mateo, CA 94402, or e-mail it to guitplyr@mfi.com.